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An Experiment in Outsourcing at the College of Charleston Libraries



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The Problem

Over the past several years, the College of Charleston has had an increase in student enrollment. It is currently at around 7500 FTEs (10,000 students if including those attending part-time). In 1992, the University of Charleston, South Carolina was established and it presently has fourteen graduate degree programs, with more planned. During the same time, the College of Charleston Library has also seen an increase in its material budget, reflecting the College's continuing commitment to supporting the teaching and research needs of its faculty and students. The firm order budget has increased by 79% and the approval plan budget has increased by 78% from fiscal year 1994/1995 to 1996/1997! More specifically, in 1994-1995, the materials budget for monographs was \$457,868.00. Out of that amount, \$283,868.00 was spent on departmental firm orders and \$180,000.00 was spent on the approval plan, administered through **Blackwell's** and the Collection Development Department of the College of Charleston Libraries. In 1996-1997, the materials budget for monographs had increased to \$593,956.00, with \$357,956.00 budgeted for departmental firm orders and \$230,000.00 budgeted for the **Blackwell's** approval plan. The Library has also continued to add new journal titles each year and has recently acquired several fairly large gift collections.

How can a Catalog Department keep up with an increasing workload with no additional staff? Should we accept having a large backlog of materials accumulate if the Library's materials budget and gift collections continue to increase, or do we explore outsourcing options? Since we don't think we can work faster, we have to find a way to work smarter. We wanted to determine if using **Blackwell's** LCMARC with Books service without CIP upgrading would be worthwhile in terms of cataloging productivity and efficiency. We were also interested in determining what would be the additional costs involved if we did pay for the CIP upgrading.

Staffing

The Collection Development Department consists of one librarian, four Library Technical Assistants, and fifteen student workers. The Catalog Department consists of two Librarians and three Library Technical Assistants, plus seven student workers. We managed to increase the number of new titles cataloged from 14,117 in 1995/1996 to 23,224 for 1996/1997. But that may be the

maximum number of titles a Department our size can realistically catalog.

The Solution?

During the 1996/1997 fiscal year, the Library's Technical Services Division, consisting of the Collection Development Department and the Catalog Department, decided to test the feasibility of outsourcing the cataloging of our **Blackwell's** approval plan, by using their MARC with Books service for LC MARC records without CIP. **Blackwell's** LC MARC records without CIP are free and those records supplied with CIP upgrading are \$1.50 per upgraded record. We also chose not to have **Blackwell's** supply us with CAN MARC or UK MARC records.

In February 1997, the Library obtained the first shipment of free LC MARC records for our approval plan titles and loaded them into our online catalog. We acquired the records by weekly FTP for a total of eleven shipments. The records were loaded into our catalog, minus any duplicate records. We decided to mask each loaded record because we do not keep every approval plan title. Instead, shipments are shelved in the Collection Development Department, where faculty and librarians can review each title and place "Keep" or "Return" slips in each book. After two weeks, a shipment is taken down, reviewed by the Collection Development Librarian for any titles that may need to be kept that did not have a slip in it, keeping budget considerations in mind.

The Results

Using **Blackwell's** LC MARC with Books without the CIP upgrading did not increase our productivity. The Library received 667 titles in the three shipments studied. We FTP'd 611 LC MARC records from **Blackwell's**. Forty-five of the 611 records were duplicates of MARC records we already had in our catalog and they were not loaded. So a total of 566 LC MARC with Books records were loaded from the three shipments. Out of those 566 records, 443 or 78% were CIP at the time of loading.

We were interested in what would be the costs involved if we did pay for the CIP upgrading based on the titles we receive on our approval plan. We had a total of 8,418 approval plan titles sent to us during 1996/1997. If we had paid for **Blackwell's** CIP upgrading, we would have had to spend an additional \$6,566.04 as part of the approval plan budget. If 78% of the 975 titles that were returned in 1996/1997 had a CIP up-

graded record, then \$1,141.50 would have been spent for no reason.

To Mask or Not To Mask

Several decisions that we made and circumstances of our situation may have been problematic when we look back over the experiment. First, the Library has not yet changed our OCLC terminals for new workstations, so we are still using OCLC's Passport for DOS for ordering, cataloging and Interlibrary loan purposes. The Catalog Department has two OCLC terminals each with a DRA (Data Research Associates) terminal next to it to export or overlay a record. For approval plan titles, we normally search OCLC for the correct bibliographic record, do any needed editing, attach our holdings to the record, produce a spine label and then export it to our online catalog.

We decided to "mask" records for approval plan books from public view. This is contrary to our decision to let patrons know when a book is "on order" or "received" but not yet cataloged. We made this decision because we did not wish to raise expectations among faculty and students that a title was in the process of being cataloged when, in fact, a decision had not even been made to keep the title. Also, our catalog's Web version lists the most recently entered title first and the loaded **Blackwell's** records would be listed as having "No holdings," since they would not yet be cataloged and barcoded. Again, this could also be frustrating to our patrons. It could also be time-consuming for our staff if they had to locate a title from one of these shipments for a patron, since the title could be in several locations.

Because we masked the records, we complicated our workflow in having to search both the online catalog and OCLC before cataloging. We spent more time away from cataloging to track down why a record was masked and if the book was still in house but not yet cataloged. We do not have a program that allows us to obtain a list of records still inadvertently masked after cataloging. We ended up having to periodically check each control number assigned to each record during the original load to determine if the record had mistakenly not been unmasked.

The masking decision also had implications for materials that we were sending to the bindery (about 15% of every shipment). We send approval plan books to the bindery prior to cataloging them. This extended the

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time that a masked record was in our catalog since we had kept the masked records in the system for those titles sent to the Bindery. We were still checking to see if those books had been returned, cataloged and processed without being unmasked six months after the experiment ended! And since the majority of records (78%) were CIP, they needed to be overlaid by the already upgraded OCLC MARC records, which does slow down the whole cataloging process.

Future Plans

We do plan to experiment with three shipments where Blackwell's supplies LC MARC with Books with CIP upgrading to determine how many titles still need editing by us. Perhaps a trained student worker supervised by a Library Technical Assistant would be able to match most of the titles

with their correct loaded record in such an efficient manner that it would offset the costs incurred by the Library for paying for some CIP upgraded records for titles not kept. And of course, once we get our new cataloging workstations, with OCLC's Passport for Windows as well as our online catalog's Windows version for cataloging, we may need to rethink our cataloging procedures and workflows for updating our OCLC holdings and generating spine labels. It certainly is possible that the additional costs of obtaining Blackwell's LC MARC with Books with CIP upgrading service may be offset by the increase in cataloging of other new materials and gifts that could be done by the Department's Library Technical Assistants, preventing the Library from accumulating any large backlogs of uncataloged materials. As always, there is still much to be explored and assessed when looking at outsourcing so that quality is not sacrificed for quantity. 🐾

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the annual parade of the best acquisitions people in the Western hemisphere -- perhaps in the whole World. The annual release of frustration and professional boost that come with the conference have saved my sanity more than once over the past [mumble] years and I will have to do a lot of meditation to make up for the loss of them this year." We'll miss you Connie! Next year!

Charles W. Bailey, Jr. (Assistant Dean for Systems, U. of Houston) <cbailey@uh.edu> sends work over PACS-L that Version 11 of the *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography* is now available. This selective bibliography presents over 600 articles, books, electronic documents, and other sources that are useful in understanding scholarly electronic publishing efforts on the Internet and other networks. Here are the

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their instructions. Still, it seems that libraries which are happy to have all material processed in a standard way are generally pleased with the results.

In most New Zealand and Australian university libraries academic staff play an active role in selection. Increasingly they have the option to mark records in a variety of databases and transmit them electronically to the library, and subsequently the vendor, but most still rely heavily on printed sources. Many academic libraries use slips approval plans extensively, but in New Zealand there are few books approval plans in operation. The University of Auckland has a small approval plan for selected contemporary German authors, but distance from suppliers and budget and currency fluctuations have made anything else seem too difficult to contemplate. At this university the academic staff have always taken a prominent role in selection, which has the advantage that they obtain the material they want for their teaching and research, and the Library has the benefit (without any cost) of subject experts in building the collection. There has, therefore, been no pressure to move

towards more approval plans. When the budget is tight, selection decisions become critical, and academic

staff and subject librarians rightly prefer to retain control of this process.

In the September, 1996, *ATG* [v.8#4, p.23] **Judy Evans** wrote about the major approval plan the **Australian National University Library** has set up with **Academic Book Center**. In addition the **Griffith University Library** has entered into a partnership agreement with **Blackwell's** to supply shelf-ready material from overseas. They are establishing a purchase plan, and hope eventually to obtain 60% of their material from a profile that will be so tight that checking before supply will become unnecessary. Other Australian librarians have told me that they too are moving towards a greater use of approval plans and shelf-ready supply from overseas vendors. In one case at least, this came as a direct result of staff reductions following cuts in government funding.

It is too soon to have an evaluation of the success of the selection plans in Australia. But the disadvantages of this kind of outsourcing may also be related to cost. Currency fluctuations of even a small amount can make a huge difference to libraries which spend around 80% of the budget overseas, and this can wreak havoc with approval plans. Another disadvantage is that using overseas vendors in outsourcing arrangements takes away jobs from local residents, and gives them to workers in another country. This is already widespread practice in New Zealand, where the dismantling of tariffs has led to manufacturing closures and the export of

jobs to cheap-labor Asian countries. The ideology has a strong grip here and is increasingly taking hold in Australia as well. These reasons may be unique to libraries outside the USA and UK, but we would share concerns about the loss of control and flexibility, the loss of local expertise, and dependency on the outsourcing vendor. **John Perry Smith** (*ATG*, v.8#4, September 96, p.25) noted that approval plans "inject a serum of banality into the major research collections of our country". In *ACQNET* 7:18 **Cliff Urr** made the point that quality issues are

"Outsourcing selection ... is an issue in only a few Australian libraries."

as real in libraries as money issues, and that outsourcing centrally important library functions may save money, but will lessen the quality service the library provides.

Even in a small country like New Zealand, there are many ways of slicing the cake. Ideally libraries should be able to carefully evaluate the various options for outsourcing, rather than have decisions imposed upon them by budget cuts, and make their decisions based on the best possible service for their individual requirements. A colleague in Australia commented to me that outsourcing seems to be a virus sweeping library management; she expects that it will run its course and leave some things changed forever and others as they were. And by that time we will no doubt be well in the embrace of the next bright new concept. 🐾

